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The Religious Conditions in Czechoslovakia,

by

President T. G. Masaryk.

OUR religious development as well as the religious conditions in our Republic indicate the desirability of separating Church and State. I necessarily expected that by the union with Slovakia and the addition of Carpathian Ruthenia to our Republic, the ecclesiastical and religious conditions among our people also would become more complicated; and I foresaw that, as has always happened in other countries, political liberty would render more acute the ecclesiastical and religious question, and for that very reason I desired to limit this process to a purely ecclesiastical and religious field.

We already have a new Czechoslovak Church, and Orthodoxy is also spreading; the number of Protestants has been increased by a considerable portion of the Slovaks (of the Augsburg denomination), the Uniates of Carpathian Ruthenia have been added, while on the united territory of our Republic the considerable number of Jews has also gained in importance. Thus our Republic is composed not only of several nationalities, but it also has a considerable number of Churches and denominations. We have the Catholic denomination with the Uniate, the Czechoslovak, the Protestant (of various denominations), the Orthodox, the Unitarian, and the Jewish. In addition to all these there is a large number of persons who are without denomination or rather who do not belong to any Church; yet, many of them have their private religious convictions. Amid the hustle of politics few of our people realise how complicated our Republic is in ecclesiastical matters and how acute a religious crisis is occurring in our ecclesiastical life.

Under Austria-Hungary the predominating Church upon the territory now comprising our Republic, was the Catholic one. The native Protestants, the members of the Reformed Church (Calvinists), and the Lutherans (of the Augsburg denomination) upon what were known as the historical territories were recognised by the State but they did not enjoy official favour, while the few foreign missions (Baptists and others) were tolerated more or less. In Slovakia the Slovak minority of Protestants (Lutherans) and a few

members of the Reformed Church suffered racial oppression just as the Catholic majority. In Carpathian Ruthenia the Uniates were likewise Magyarised and the Orthodox movement was oppressed. The Jews had succeeded in gaining the favour of the Hungarian and Viennese authorities.

To-day, with ecclesiastical liberty prevailing, the conditions have changed, and particularly upon the historical territories, those who did not believe that the religious question is a very important one for our nation are now compelled to change their opinion.

If we compare the figures of the official census for 1910 and 1921 (we have no detailed figures showing how the conditions in the Churches changed during the individual years), we see that during the existence of the Republic the Czechoslovak Church has been established with 525,333 members, who with few exceptions have seceded from the Catholic Church, and according to all accounts the number to-day is much greater. During the same period the number of persons who left the Catholic Church is 724,507 (with the other Churches such cases were few) and these persons remain without religious denomination. Under Austria in 1910 the number of persons without denomination upon the historical territories was only 12,981 ; of the above-mentioned number 6,818 belong to Slovakia and 1,174 to Carpathian Ruthenia.

The Catholic Church (Uniate) in Carpathian Ruthenia was also reduced in numbers ; under Hungary in 1910 the number of members of the Orthodox Church in that area was 558, while in 1921 it was 60,986.

Side by side with this considerable increase of the Czechoslovak and Orthodox Churches a considerable increase of all the Protestant Churches can likewise be noted, but this applies to the Czech population, the increase among the Germans having been negligible. . In 1910 the number of Reformed and Lutheran Czechs upon the historical territories was 157,067 (Germans 153,612), while in 1921 there were 231,199 (Germans 153,767). Thus there was a very considerable increase among our Protestants.

Similarly, there was an increase of members also in the smaller Churches, mainly among the Unity of Brethren, the number of whom increased from 1,022 to 3,933 ; the Free Reformed Church (Congregationalists) increased from 2,497 to 5,511 ; the Baptists from 4,292 to 9,360 ; while the number of Methodists is at present 1,455.

The number of Protestants of various denominations and all nationalities in the Republic is now almost a million (990,319).

In more recent times the Unitarians have been added, the number being stated as 10,000.

The numbers in the Orthodox Church increased also upon the historical territories from 1,054 to 9,082 and in Slovakia from 1,439 to 2,877.

The Armenian Orthodox Church forms an insignificant fragment, its numbers having increased from 9 to 152.

There has been also quite an increase among the Old Catholics, the majority of whom are of German nationality. In 1910 they numbered 17,121, in 1921 the corresponding figure was 20,255.

By the addition of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia we have received a considerable number of Jews,—354,342 in all, but this number is smaller as compared with 1910, when there were 361,650. The figures in detail are as follows :—

Bohemia : 79,777 ; Moravia : 37,989 ; Silesia : 7,317 ; Slovakia : 135,918 ; Carpathian Ruthenia : 87,041.

Side by side with the religious movement in the Churches there is a very marked interest in spiritualism, the number of spiritualists being estimated at about two or three hundred thousand. Theosophy and other similar exotic cults are also in evidence.

These ecclesiastical conditions in our Republic and particularly the religious movement are characterised by the strength of the Hussite tradition and the religious attachment to the Reformation ; this movement amongst us corresponds to the analogous Orthodox movement in Carpathian Ruthenia.

All the Protestant Churches go back to the Reformation ; the Czech Reformists and Lutherans have united as the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren ; the Free Reformed Church is now the Unity of the Czech Brethren ; the Baptists are the Fraternal Unity of Chelcicky, while the Unity of Brethren has a direct tradition and continuity with the Brotherhood. The Czechoslovak Church is a Hussite Church and the Unitarians also go back to the Brotherhood.

The religious movement amongst us has aroused great attention abroad, attention which is all the greater because nearly everywhere Catholicism is gaining ground or at least authority, while amongst us the tradition of the Reformation is stronger. Even abroad it is now beginning to be understood that the Czech problem was of more than merely a narrow political significance.

It is natural that the new and the renewed Churches will seek contact with the foreign Churches cognate to them. The Czechoslovak Church is cognate to the Anglican and

Old Catholic Church ; the Orthodox movement is seeking connection with the Churches of Serbia and Constantinople, while we also have Orthodox neighbours in Roumania and Russia. Various Protestant Churches are in touch with their Churches in Western Europe. Altogether the ecclesiastical movement is acquiring a significance of an international, and therefore also of a political character.

The Jews are also exhibiting a considerable religious movement ; in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia we have the Orthodox or Eastern tendency side by side with the Western or liberal variety. Zionism and the Jewish national movement are also very important in their bearings upon the Jewish question.

Diversity in ecclesiastical denominations urges towards religious tolerance, just as diversity of nationality leads to national tolerance.

The principle of tolerance is also of Reformation origin. Not that the Reformation in its very beginnings achieved the liberty which it demanded from the Church ; it was not until a later development, notably among the Independents in England, that liberty of conscience and tolerance became established. In the mediæval Church by the authority of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the heretic met with death ; I need not mention the case of Servet to make it clear that in the modern Churches mediæval barbarity was not entirely effaced. The development of the spirit of toleration was very gradual ; we must remember that Locke, that great advocate of toleration, was unable to tolerate Atheists. It was not until the French revolution that the rights of man, and with them, complete freedom of conscience were codified, but this was achieved only as regards religion, and not yet in the sphere of politics.

In Austria there was no liberty of conscience ; in our democratic Republic genuine liberty of conscience, the toleration and recognition of what is good and what is better must be not only codified but also practised in all the spheres of public life. That is a national demand, a demand made by our historical development. Palacky's philosophy of our history estimates the Czech Brotherhood as its highest attainment : pure Christianity, that is, the doctrine of Jesus and His admonition to love, is the bequest of the " father of our nation " and of our history,—democracy is the political form of humanitarianism. By toleration we shall make our way from Hapsburg theocracy to democracy.

Jesus, not Cæsar, I repeat,—this is the meaning of our history and democracy.





